12/30/71

Mr. Neil Sheehan
The New York Times
229 W 43 St.,
New York, N.Y. 10036

Dear Mr. Sheehan,

Your report on the NBC white papers on Vietnam credits neither you nor Fred Freed, the Times or NBC. It is particularly painful to me because I have been the victim, as I see it, of both the inadequacies and dishonesties of the Times and of NBC, yet I tell you the country is indebted to both for the belated attention each has given the subject of Vietnam.

As yet neither of you has done enough, but you have both, if so very late, done very well.

I suspect, and I ask you to ask yourself, if you did not fix upon deficiencies in your own fine work, as brought to light by NBC, as a basis for criticism. You didn't see it in The Pentagon Papers, didn't say it there, therefore it is wrong?

The Pentagon Papers are far from complete. You accept them as the last word. On John Kennedy and Vietnam withdrawal, you are quite wrong in your criticism of NBC, and the position to which he moved is firmer than NBC indicated. You didn't do your own homework but relied upon the incomplete Pentagon Papers. My own work on this goes back to the period of the assassination(s). It does not rely on Hilsman or Forrestal.

Because for all their defeciencies The Pentagon Papers is so very important, and because while the NBC White Papers fell far short of what they could have been they remain a significant contribution to public knowledge and understanding, with the influence of the Times, I really do regret that you seem to have fallen into a sour-grapes attitude. It would be tragic if this kind of unfair reporting would reduce the slim enough prospects for other such TV ventures. NBC deserves unstinted praise for these shows as it deserves your apology.

Your own fine work can be more seriously flawed if you were but aware of it. For example, the handling of the Gulf of Tonkin matter. Ask yourself what proof you had that the second alleged attack ever happened. Yet you present it as fact. The Pentagon Papers didn't have the other side, so you didn't. They don't really have JFK on withdrawal (the Pentagon didn't, either) so to you it isn't so.

Should there be another such show and should you again be called upon to review it, I hope you will then bear in mind what Jesus said about the stoning of the prostitute. Meanwhile, should the government ever follow through on what Ziegler indicated might be possible and raise any questions about non-use of the so-called "Freedom of Information" Act, perhaps I can help you. (You'd never know this from reading the Times, but I've filed a number of suits under it and actually got an unreported summary judgement against the Department of Justice. NBC also knew and also didn't report.) Let you both earned thanks and mine at least you both have.

Sincerely, Harold Weisberg

cc:Fred Freed